

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00
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PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-12
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3729
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NY
USMISSION SINAI
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 7773

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT IS
SUBJ: ISRAELI "ANSWERS": INTRA-CABINET IMPLICATIONS

1. SUMMARY: THE FOLLOWING REPRESENTS OUR INITIAL STOCK-
TAKING OF THE CABINET AFTER THREE WEEKS OF FRENETIC FOREIGN
POLICY DEBATE. IF IN THE END BEGIN PREVAILED, HIS VICTORY
WAS FLAWED. HIS AUTHORITY IS IN QUESTION AS HE IS SHOWN TO
BE OUT OF STEP WITH MAJOR FIGURES IN HIS HOWN CABINET.
DAYAN'S TALMUDIC MASTERY OF AMBIGUOUS PHRASEOLOGY AND THE
ABSENCE OF PERCEIVED EGYPTIAN FLEXIBILITY GAVE THE PRIME
MINISTER HIS WIN THIS TIME. WEIZMAN'S ISOLATION IS A SHORT-
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TERM DEFEAT AND REPRESENTS FURTHER EROSION OF HIS HERUT
BASE OF SUPPORT. HOWEVER, HE SHOWED THAT ONLY HE AMONG
THE SENIOR MINISTERS IS WILLING TO STAND UP TO BEGIN IN
PURSUIT OF MODERATION. IN THE LONGER TERM THIS MAY REDOUND
TO HIS CREDIT. FINANCE MINISTER ERLICH'S STOCK HAS RISEN,
AT LEAST WITH BEGIN. THE BRUITED LIBERAL-WEIZMAN ENTENTE
MAY HAVE BEEN DEALT A BLOW. THE RESOLUTION OF THE CABINET

DEBATE WAS A DAYAN-BEGIN OPERATION IN WHICH THE MUTUALLY
DEPENDENT NATURE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WAS EXPOSED. END
SUMMARY

2. THE FOLLOWING ARE FIRST THOUGHTS ON IMPLICATIONS OF
EVENTS OF THE LAST THREE WEEKS FOR THE CONTINUED FUNCTIONING
OF THE CABINET AND CERTAIN OF ITS COMPONENTS.

3. BEGIN, AFTER THREE WEEKS OF INCREASINGLY TORRID RUMORS
OF SHIFTING CABINET ALLIANCES IN FAVOR OF "SOFT" ANSWERS
UNACCEPTABLE TO THE PRIME MINISTER, CAME OUT ON TOP. HE
PREVAILED, BUT HIS VICTORY BORE A HEAVY COST. THE PRIME
MINISTER WAS PUT IN THE POSITION OF HAVING TO EXERT EXTRA-
ORDINARY PRESSURE ON HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES SIMPLY TO
ARRIVE AT AN AMBIGUOUS FORMULATION WHICH WOULD MEET HIS
MINIMAL IDEOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS. THIS IS AN EXERCISE
WHICH LOSES SOME OF ITS EFFECTIVENESS WITH EACH USE; BEGIN
CANNOT RESORT TO IT AGAIN AND AGAIN.

4. MORE IMPORTANT, BEGIN'S AUTHORITY HAS BEEN PUT IN
QUESTION MORE THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE MAY 1977. NOW, IN
ADDITION TO GROWING PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF A POORLY
FUNCTIONING GOVERNMENT (AS REVEALED IN A JUST-RELEASED
HAARETZ POLL) AND CONCERNS OVER THE PRIME MINISTER'S
HEALTH, BEGIN, WHO DERIVES MUCH PUBLIC SUPPORT FROM HIS
IMAGE AS A FIGURE OF AUTHORITY, HAS SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE
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SHAKILY IN CONTROL OF CABINET DECISION-MAKING. TO A
COUNTRY WHICH WANTS A STRONG HAND AT THE TOP,
THE PRIME MINISTER'S
WEAKENING GRIP WILL MATTER IF IT CONTINUES.

5. APPARENTLY, ONLY SEVERAL DAYS BEFORE THE JUNE 18 CABINET
MEETING, BEGIN WAS STILL POSITIONED AT THE EXTREME END OF A
POLARIZED GOVERNMENT. BUT IN THE END, THE REMARKABLE DRAFTING
TALENTS OF MOSHE DAYAN AND PERCEIVED EGYPTIAN INTRANSIGENCE
MADE POSSIBLE A COMPROMISE ACCEPTABLE TO MOST OF THE CABINET.
HOWEVER, BEGIN'S CLAIM THAT HIS FOREIGN POLICY REPRESENTS A
NATIONAL CONSENSUS LOST SOME OF ITS FORCE AS THE CABINET
DISAGREEMENTS CONTINUED AND WERE REPORTED IN FINE DETAIL BY
A HUNGRY PRESS. TO MANY ISRAELIS IT IS NEITHER FITTING NOR
INDICATIVE OF POLITICAL STRENGTH WHEN A COMPROMISE IS NECESSARY
TO ACCOMMODATE THE VIEWS OF
THE PRIME MINISTER ON THE ONE HAND AND SEVERAL OF THE PRINCIPALS
OF HIS CABINET ON THE OTHER.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 7773

YM WEIZMAN HAS COME OUT A SHORT-TERM LOSER. HE WAS UNABLE TO CARRY THE DAY AGAINST BEGIN'S HARD LINE, EVEN THOUGH A MAJORITY OF THE CABINET WAS IDEOLOGICALLY CAPABLE OF (AND AT ONE POINT LAST WEEK SEEMINGLY EAGER ABOUT) ACCEPTING HIS POSITIVE FORMULATION. ONCE AGAIN, HIS WEAKNESS IN DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH BEGIN AND HIS IMPULSIVENESS HAVE BEEN EXPOSED. HIS REMARK THAT HE WAS GOING OFF TO "PREPARE FOR THE NEXT WAR" WAS ANOTHER INSTANCE OF THE PERFECTLY PLACED FOOT IN MOUTH. ALSO, WEIZMAN FURTHER DISTANCED HIMSELF FROM THE RANK AND FILE OF HERUT, HIS PARTY BASE. THE VITRIOLIC RESPONSES OF MANY WITHIN THE LIKUD TO HIS HARSH CHARACTERIZATIONS OF DAYAN AND THE CABINET DECI-
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SION ARE INDICATIVE OF THIS LOSS OF INTERNAL SUPPORT.

7. BUT, IN A WAY, THIS EPISODE ALSO REVEALED WEIZMAN'S STRENGTH.

EZER WEIZMAN IS THE ONLY CABINET MINISTER WHO DARED RISK PUBLICLY DISAGREEING WITH BEGIN, FOR ONLY HE DOES NOT HAVE A GREAT DEAL TO LOSE IF THIS GOVERNMENT FALLS. UNLIKE DAYAN, YADIN AND MOST OTHER MINISTERS, HIS POLITICAL CAREER IS SECURELY TIED TO THE FUTURE RATHER THAN THE PAST, AND HIS PUBLIC DISPLAY OF MODERATION COULD WELL HAVE IMPROVED HIS LONG-TERM CREDENTIALS AS A NATIONAL LEADER.

8. ERLICH HAS ACCUMULATED ADDITIONAL CREDIT WITH BEGIN, CHIPS HE MAY BE ABLE TO CASH IN IN THE GREAT SUCCESSION SWEEPSTAKES. ONCE AGAIN, ERLICH PLAYED THE PIVOTAL ROLE; HIS DOCILITY AND LOYALTY WERE CRUCIAL IN ENABLING BEGIN TO LINE UP THE PREPONDERANT ELEMENTS BEHIND HIM. (HAD ERLICH JOINED WITH WEIZMAN AND YADIN AND COMPANY, THE OUTCOME WOULD HAVE BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT.) CERTAINLY, THIS EPISODE DOES NOT AUGUR WELL FOR THE CHANCES OF A LIBERAL-WEIZMAN LINK-UP. MUTUAL RECRIMINATIONS ARE BOUND TO FURTHER POSTPONE THE FORMATION OF ANY SUCH ALLIANCE.

9. IN THE END, THIS WAS A BEGIN-DAYAN OPERATION. ONCE AGAIN, THE MUTUALLY DEPENDENT NATURE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN EXPOSED. BEGIN DEPENDS ON DAYAN'S CREATIVE DRAFTING OF AMBIGUOUS FORMULAE WHICH ARE ACCEPTABLE TO CABINET (AND NATIONAL) ELEMENTS BEYOND THE LIMITS OF THE BEGIN-HERUT HARD CORE AND DAYAN'S. DAYAN, IN TURN, MUST CONTINUE TO SERVE THIS FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY, FOR ONCE HAVING LOST HIS USEFULNESS TO BEGIN, HE WILL HAVE NO CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE ROLE. FOR THE NTH TIME DAYAN'S UNWILLINGNESS TO CONFRONT HIS PRIME MINISTER HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED. LEWIS

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